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TAGS: [IZ](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: ASSESSING RECENT VIOLENCE IN ANBAR

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Classified By: PRT Anbar Team Leader James Soriano for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (U) Summary. Six car bombing and suicide bomber attacks in Anbar Province since mid-July appear to have been conducted by remnants of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) or by nationalist insurgent groups to create an atmosphere of instability and to degrade the effectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Despite recent headlines about bombings in Fallujah and Ramadi, there has been no notable increase in the underlying patterns of violence in Anbar Province. To the contrary, insurgent-related violence in the province remains at historically low levels. Local political and security officials acknowledge the seriousness of recent car bomb attacks and say they are committed to dealing with the situation. The public appears to feel secure enough that most Anbaris continue to welcome the departure of U.S. military forces from the cities. While the overall rate of security incidents in Anbar, including the recent attacks, has consistently averaged about one per day over the past three months, the lethality of the multiple car bomb and suicide bomber attacks since mid-July does represent a departure from the norm and is being watched closely by both Iraqi and US security forces. End summary.

No change in overall security trends

[1](#)3. (C) Although the recent attacks have been more lethal than other security incidents in recent months, cumulatively they do not break a long-established pattern of a low level of violence in Anbar. According to MNF-West statistics, there were 35 security incidents in the whole province in July, which is generally in line with the 90-day average of slightly more than one incident a day. This level of violence is a fraction of the 1,600 to 1,900 incidents recorded in a typical month in late 2006, the high point of the Battle of Anbar. In short, although the number of attacks is in line with the recent averages, the quality of the attacks in terms of the use of car bombs and suicide bombers in relatively quick succession is a new development that bears monitoring.

Recent attacks

[1](#)4. (U) Nonetheless, several high-profile attacks have been reported by the press since mid-July, some causing multiple casualties. In Ramadi, a policeman and five civilians were killed on July 15 when a suicide bomber attacked a checkpoint of Iraqi soldiers and police officers. On July 20, a car bomb exploded near the Government Center in central Ramadi, killing two policemen, and the next day another car bomb detonated near a north Ramadi restaurant, killing two and injuring 20. On July 25, a reported truck bomb detonated near the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) headquarters, and on the

following day a suicide bomber killed four people and wounded nine others at a funeral in Fallujah. On August 2, a suicide car bomb targeting a police checkpoint on the outskirts of Fallujah killed two people and wounded seven.

A closer look

¶5. (C) Several points can be made about the above attacks:

-- They appear to be perpetrated by Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) remnant cells, or of the so-called &national resistance forces that have long been present in Anbar.
-- Most of the attacks have targeted Iraqi security forces (ISF). None has been against the Coalition Forces (CF).
-- The attacks do not appear to have the intended purpose of creating mass casualties, a typical AQI signature when targeting Shia Muslims and other groups.

Police response

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¶6. (C) Instead of demoralizing the security forces, the attacks may actually result in stepped up law enforcement efforts. In the wake of the attacks, the police have shown newfound confidence and capability. They have set curfews, vehicular travel bans, and have conducted security sweeps and made arrests as appropriate.

¶7. (C) The attacks were the lead subject at the August 3 weekly staff meeting of the Anbar Operational Command (AOC), which brings together the province's key Army and police officials. The AOC commanding general, Major General Murthi Al-Mahali, acknowledged the seriousness of the car bombings and instructed his subordinates to redouble operational and intelligence-gathering efforts. There was no talk about a possible AQI resurgence, nor was there a request for Coalition assistance in the fight against the terrorists. Instead, officials acknowledged their security problem and talked about ways of dealing with it. Intelligence officers at the meeting pointed to Baghdad as the staging area for car

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bombs that are later driven to their targets in Anbar.

¶8. (C) The following day, Anbar Governor Qassim Al-Fahadawi and Major General Murthi gave a similar security assessment to senior CF leadership at a meeting at Camp Ramadi. The tenor of that discussion was on the security measures that need to be taken against AQI. On a related front, Governor Qassim met recently with security officials and key judges to review the processes and procedures for improving actionable intelligence and prosecutable evidence for use against accused terrorists.

Public mood

¶10. (C) Fears about a renewed insurgency have long been absent in PRT and MNF-West discussions with local contacts. What polling data exists suggests that Anbaris are more concerned about inadequate essential services and with violent crime than with a possible renewed insurgency. Security issues rarely are raised in typical PRT and MNF-West engagements with governmental leaders and tribal sheikhs. The population seems to have taken notice of ISF responses to the recent attacks and has approved the efforts. In general, it views the security forces as competent, even without Coalition support.

¶11. (C) Anbaris appear to feel secure enough that they continue to want the U.S. military to depart the cities. On that score, the June 30 &Out of the Cities8 milestone has widespread public approval. At the same time, many Anbaris, especially the political and tribal elite with whom we have regular contact, want the U.S. military to remain garrisoned in bases in the nearby desert. The U.S. should go away, but not too far, seems to be the prevailing mood.

¶12. (C) Governor Qassim echoed this view when he recently told two visiting Washington-based security analysts that he

would like the U.S. military to stay in Iraq far beyond the December 31, 2011, departure date. It should be noted, however, that such sentiment for a long-term U.S. military presence appears to be motivated more by Anbaris, desire for protection against Iran, not against Al-Qaeda.

Comment

¶13. (C) Although AQI is still able to conduct high-profile attacks, it is no longer a true insurgent force that enjoys popular support. The movement has long been expelled from Anbari cities and towns. It has been tactically disrupted. The fact that most of the attacks can be linked to cells operating from Baghdad Province suggests that AQI is not on the cusp of rebuilding itself in Anbar.

¶14. (C) While lethal, the fact that none of the recent bombings appears to have been intended to cause mass casualties suggests that the the Anbar attacks represent Sunni-on-Sunni violence, rather than part of a campaign to foment Sunni-Shi,a sectarian strife. That said, it does not appear that the attacks are linked to intra-Anbari Sunni political maneuverings. As noted in paragraph 4, one of the recent attacks reportedly targeted the IIP headquarters in Fallujah. Various groups of radicals, such as Hamas Al-Iraq, orbit along the outer fringes of the IIP, and the Fallujah bombing may be part of a struggle among them or IIP factions.

Instead, the objectives seem to be to create the perception of instability, to demoralize the security forces, and to send the public the message that AQI is still a force to be reckoned with. Creating an atmosphere of instability could force local officials to strike a deal with AQI operatives, granting them space to reorganize and re-establish itself. Many Anbari leaders reached such an accommodation during the height of the 2004-2006 insurgency. Nonetheless, there is Qno evidence to suggest that the public would countenance a bid by AQI to insinuate itself into Anbaris, daily lives to the extent that it had previously done.

¶15. (C) Anbar Province is still not out of the woods on security. AQI can and does strike with lethal effect. There is nothing new in those assessments; however, despite the recent car bombing and suicide bomber attacks, the encouraging development on the local scene has been improved police performance. The ISF have responded properly, with confidence, and without CF assistance, highlighting the turn of Anbari public opinion against the insurgents and the increased efficacy of ISF operations.

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